

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

P.S. 142 Amalia Castro
Elementary school M142

100 ATTORNEY STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10002

Principal: RHONDA LEVY

Dates of review: March 29-30, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Daniella Phillips

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S. 142 Amalia Castro is an Elementary school with 428 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 13% Black, 75% Hispanic, 3% White, 6% Asian students and 2% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders make highly informed and strategic organizational and instructional decisions that elevate coherence of practices, leading to the attainment of the school's short and long-term goals. (1.3)
 - o The teacher hiring team is explicit when recruiting and screening potential teachers that committing time and effort to support students' after school experience is a core expectation of working at the school. For example, staff seek ways to partner with community agencies and groups, extend themselves to help fund materials for families in need and provide recreational activities, including a popular running club, after school. These efforts produce close bonds within the school community as adults and students learn and communicate together. An innovative outgrowth of the school's healthy culture has been that staff not only meet regularly in inquiry groups, but that they trust the inquiry process for school improvement beyond the academic realm. This explains how teachers have broadened their approach to data collection by designing a new anecdotal behavior record-keeping system. As a result, all students are engaged in rigorous work and there is effective monitoring of student disruptions with supportive follow up and structural interventions. Therefore, staff increasingly utilize the inquiry approach to problem solve and improve curricular, instructional, organizational, and developmental decisions, resulting in meaningful student work products.
- Teachers set a high bar for professional collaboration and effective distributed leadership that results in deep investment in continuous improvement. (4.2)
 - o Staff voted in favor of scheduling two-and-a-half hours weekly of team meeting time for all teachers, which reflects the school's strong culture of professional development, shared learning, trust and commitment to improved teacher practice school-wide. Furthermore, team meeting protocols ensure that student work frames all discussions, which leads to thoughtful analysis of student progress and teacher practice, as well as teachers impacting school-wide policies around academics. As a result, teachers feel highly valued and invested in key school decisions, as evidenced by 95% teacher retention at the school last year. Prime examples of this distributed leadership are the teacher-led teams, where professional collaboration is so effective that teams have filmed their meetings to share with other schools and one group will present about inquiry-based child study at an upcoming conference in Italy.
- Staff excel at meeting the social-emotional needs of all learners with in-school programs and external partnerships produce a very strong climate for learning and lead to improved student achievement. (4.4)
 - o Concerned about escalating frequency of disruptions in class, the school has invested deeply in the Strategies, Techniques and Options Prior to Placement (STOPP) program this year, and has complemented STOPP with a rewards program that reinforces positive student behaviors and allows for more focused learning in class. All staff have been well trained and supported in varied, research-based class management approaches and promoting pro-social student behaviors and increased class time for learning. Moreover, a review of data around student behavior led to a new partnership with Asphalt Green's recess

enhancement program has provided greater structure and planned fun activities for students during recess time. As a result, student suspensions and referrals to more restrictive special education settings are down significantly from last year, while teachers express increased confidence in their youth development capacity.

- Relationships among parents, students, teachers and school leaders are positive and trusting, contributing significantly to students' improved academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - o Parents, teachers and students report high levels of trusting relationships, meaningful involvement in school decision-making and positive school culture. This is clearly in evidence by visiting classrooms and walking in hallways, as families are known well and invited into a welcoming environment and teacher to student rapport is exceptionally nurturing. Students across grades appear very motivated by what they learn, as they describe writing using Mayan hieroglyphics, researching Italian culture and producing a play by Shakespeare as "challenging and cool". The school's community-minded approach to learning and regular review of data has contributed to a steady rise in student attendance from 92% in 2009 to 93% in 2010 to 94.4% so far this year. Key stakeholders demonstrate deep commitment to the STOPP program and student rewards, which has reinforced its effective implementation.
- School leaders pair the observation of classroom teaching with constructive feedback that provides clear expectations and support for improved practice. (4.1)
 - o School leaders have set an ambitious agenda of short, frequent cycles of class visits, focused walk-throughs to special education classes and follow up. To date, all teachers have had at least two informal observations with written feedback that includes positive observations, suggested next steps and a brief teacher reflection on the lesson. This observational approach is rooted in the research-based rubric of Charlotte Danielson and teachers express that feedback received has been constructive and specific. As a result, teachers better understand common instructional expectations and there is improved consistency of effective teaching practices across the school, as evidenced in classroom visits.
- Teachers engage students to good extent with differentiated instruction and project-based learning, which motivates students to do their best. (1.2)
 - o Teachers routinely incorporate student choice and different modalities that lead to high student interest. For example, first graders sketch a local subway station and interview a transportation employee, while fourth graders discuss a poem's meaning using Grand Conversation protocol. There are sufficient planned examples of supports, including graphic organizers and altered assignments, for struggling learners, with less frequent extensions planned for higher achieving students. Classroom instruction consistently follows a workshop model approach whereby students spend much of their time working in small groups, pairs or independently. Most students appear engaged in their learning tasks and they speak excitedly of favorite projects, such as designing historical timelines and building model bridges. As a result, there is a positive buzz of students learning in classrooms and improved student work on display in hallways and portfolios.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop further current systems for assessment and grading in order to provide students and families with the most meaningful information about next learning steps. (5.2)
 - o Parents report positively in person and via School Survey about communication from teachers and school leaders. They highlight the school's open and welcoming environment for families and the school's outreach, including home visits by staff, "Family Friday" activities, and support for students well beyond classroom learning. However, parents receive limited written feedback about students' academic learning progress, as the school's three standard report cards each year provide an incomplete picture. To that end, school leaders are currently discussing alternative approaches to communicating meaningful feedback, such as piloting a narrative document. Staff also continue to improve what are sometimes generic rubrics by personalizing them to performance tasks, which offers students and parents clear next steps. It is too soon to know fully the impact of these promising efforts in improving shared performance data and assessing learning progress. The lack of targeted, carefully designed rubrics is currently limiting the effectiveness of assessment and the specificity of feedback given to students, hindering students' academic growth.

- Strengthen the monitoring of students' math achievement to accelerate progress in this key content area. (5.3)
 - o School leaders are aware that math achievement lags behind other academic subjects, especially for African American and Hispanic boys. To their credit, they have identified this concern as a goal in the Comprehensive Education Plan and have begun to address the concern with targeted professional development for teachers, tutors for small group work, and computer-based math programs, such as Gigi, to reinforce skills. Yet there is insufficient oversight over daily math instruction. For example, students appear to have reading and writing instruction on most mornings, with math lessons mainly in the afternoons. This schedule may not optimize students' attention span and focus for learning math, leading to limited academic growth opportunities for these students. Additionally, while there is thoughtful tracking by teachers of students' reading levels and writing progress, there are inconsistent practices of tracking math, which weakens the school's monitoring of this key subject area.

- Develop more comprehensive and effective ways of organizing student data by class to better inform instructional decisions. (2.3)
 - o Teachers and school leaders track some areas of student achievement data well, especially reading levels and writing. Teachers use on-line trackers for reading level progress and they have developed very good benchmarks for assessing students' informational writing. While there is good consistency and depth in how teachers organize student data in literacy, this is not the case for math, which then confounds instructional planning. While one notable example of strong monitoring of math achievement is in a fifth grade co-teaching class where teachers track students' mastery of math skills and concepts and then identify areas for re-teaching or small group guided work, this is an exception and not the norm. Most teachers record students' progress on end-of-unit assessments from Everyday Math, but their approaches vary widely and do not lead to productive analysis of student trends.

- Refine curricula and academic tasks in order to challenge students at even higher levels. (1.1)

- o With curriculum maps well in place, albeit in varying formats, teacher teams engage productively in revising units of study to align with more rigorous expectations of Common Core Learning Standards, being careful to engage all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. Two strong examples of this work are the emphasis on writing development across all subject areas and the innovative interdisciplinary work in lower elementary grades. Students use writing in a sophisticated range of skills from logs to investigations to persuasive letters and detailed projects. Additionally, lower grade students benefit from rich, creative, hands-on units of study about bridges, hospitals and cars that integrate visual and performing arts, offer varied scaffolds and emphasize real world learning. While the curricular work is high quality, higher achieving students are not consistently being pushed to grow. Insufficient planned extensions in curricula development for these students limit the cognitive engagement of highest performing students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 142 Amalia Castro	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	
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

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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